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## THE EVOLUTION OF LUXURY.

MANY things in modern society have been subjected to a profound transformation; political institutions, moral ideas, arts and sciences, industries and commerce, are to-day very different from what they were in the past. A similar revolution has also taken place with regard to luxury, whose character has undergone a radical transformation in this century, which the historians of manners have barely noticed, but which is of great importance in the history of civilization. It has been said that nothing is more needful to man than that which is popularly called the superfluous, that without luxury the human species would in no wise be distinguished from the animal. The remark is correct, even if this need of the superfluous has been differently felt in different historic epochs.

Leaving aside minor differences of detail, the diverse forms of luxury may be divided into two large categories which represent two types of luxury in the development of civilization that mutually exclude each other; the class of luxury which we might call *barbaric-æsthetic* and the luxury that might be called *civilized-utilitarian*. The first form of luxury is named barbaric-æsthetic, although at first sight the two words seem contradictory, because while it is also found among civilized peoples, it is the first form of luxury that is encountered in human society and best shows its true nature among barbaric peoples, and because, on the other hand, this luxury presents an eminently artistic character. Its essence lies in the fact that this first form of luxury, the first known among men, rather aims at producing pleasure than at avoiding pain. Civilized-utilitarian luxury, on the other hand, which is the attribute of a people who have attained a high grade of development, loses a certain amount of its artistic character and rather strives to defend men against causes of pain than to procure them pleasures. According to some authorities, the cultus of beauty and joy in æsthetic directions is almost an essential characteristic of civilized peoples, among whom artistic tendencies are ever assuming greater proportions. This, however, is an erroneous view which springs from confounding the greater delicacy of

our æsthetic enjoyments with the important parts they play in the totality of our existence. Civilized man enjoys æsthetic pleasures which are infinitely more refined than those of the barbarians, but, in the moral and intellectual life of the barbarian, æsthetic pleasures of a ruder nature have a far greater importance; because the barbarian, in order to enjoy that which is beautiful, according to his rude tastes, submits to discomforts and defies torments which civilized man no longer has the strength to endure, just on account of his more refined artistic sense. According to our views the possession of a house is by no means a luxury but an elementary necessity of existence, of which only the most miserable members of our society are obliged to deprive themselves. Instead, in certain extraordinarily uncouth forms of barbaric-æsthetic luxury, a house is considered as a superfluity, while the necessary things are saddles and weapons studded with precious stones, ornaments of gold, and fine clothing. Such is the case with the Tanaregg, a nomad population of the Sahara desert, which is composed of an aristocracy of warriors and brigands living almost entirely by war and rapine, and a plebs of serfs of the glebe, who cultivate the earth and pay to this aristocracy a part of the product of the fields. Now the serfs have houses, humble and poor though they be, but still a plastered abode, while the nobles live under the movable tents of nomads. Even when resting between one expedition and another in a village which is inhabited by their serfs, the nobles disdain to inhabit a house and prefer to live in tents, exposed to wind and weather. Their luxuries, those which distinguish them from their servants of the glebe, as the palace and the cottage distinguish among us the noble and the peasant, are their bright colored garments and cloth of gold, their weapons incrustated with jewels, set with more or less good taste, their saddles adorned with the most fantastic ornamentation; in short, the richness of their ornaments, not the commodity of their dwellings, in which the servant is superior. All nomad peoples who have made themselves into a large military state and have taken possession of wealthy and uncivilized lands, as the result of fortunate wars, have hastened to take over with these lands

and with their subjected inhabitants the taste for artistic luxuries in the gross form in which they most attract a rude people; that is to say, they make a great display of showy objects, before appropriating those which to us seem the fundamental and elementary comforts of life and a fixed stable house. Indeed, they have often remained nomads for a long period of time after such conquests, restricting themselves to carrying into their camps all the garish luxuries of the sedentary tribes, which must have often been a serious inconvenience to their movements, covering their vestments with gems and the bare earth under their tents with rich carpets. This was done by the Mongols who conquered Persia in the fifteenth century. The capital of the Kingdom, Audjar, long remained the camping place of the Khan, which was continually changed from one site to another, in fact was a true movable capital or *ordou* as they called it in their speech, and which is the origin of our word horde. In the *ordou* the Emirs, the princesses, the grandees of the Empire, as well as the large following of merchants who hung round the court, lived in large tents made of horsehair and felt, separated from each other by hedges and rosebushes. Each spring and autumn the whole immense city was transplanted, the rich decorations, the provisions, the merchandise, were loaded on wagons, and the tents were burnt lest they should become the nesting-place of too many snakes. Then the whole procession moved, and changed its site. Yet from the description given of the *ordou* by Rasch-eldin it would seem that the city of tents harbored fabulous luxury, such as perchance is not found in the richest metropolis of the civilized world. Under the tent of the nomad shepherds the grandees of the Empire had carried their most costly carpets, their most sumptuous furniture; even all the utensils necessary to common life were made of pure gold. Here were found priceless perfumes, in fact all the magnificence, all the glitter and pageantry, that civilization had created for the sedentary peoples of the plains.

Yet it is easy to understand that nomad life was rarely very comfortable. Even when the luggage owned by the nomad was small and very light, it necessarily became most cumber-

some when the chiefs of the horde kept under their tents the numerous and complicated appliances that pertain to the house of a great lord; and, in fact, the changing of this movable capital was carried on in the midst of an indescribable confusion and general discomfort. Nevertheless, this people who were very rich, who were dominant, who had before them the example of the vanquished, this people who were in such a hurry to follow the example of the vanquished in all that pertained to show, remained perfectly indifferent to the teachings of ease which they might have learned at the same time from the sight of the stable habitations.

If, among these barbarous peoples, luxury was regarded only as an ornament, as a means of display, and not as serving in some measure to diminish the harshness of an existence which did not know ease; luxury preserved the same character, though much attenuated, among many civilized peoples. Comfort assumed an increasing importance with the developments of civilization and the habits of daily life, but we must not suppose that in all civilizations it held the important place that it has in the nineteenth century. Above all, in the great military civilizations, luxury assumed in part that character which we found to be essential in the luxury of barbarians; it is reproduced in a modified and tempered form, combined with a certain research after comfort, but still the primary characteristic is so strongly marked that we can recognize even in this luxury an infinitely greater preoccupation with æsthetic adornment than with physical ease. In fact, in these societies luxury serves rather to procure pleasures of various kinds, sensual, ostentatious, vainglorious, or artistic, than to defend the human organism against inimical external nature. This is the capital difference between the private life of the rich in the Europe of our century and the rich of the older societies. The essence of modern luxury is display and artistic beauty, which evince themselves in the splendor and the costliness of the materials employed, in the elegant refinement of ornament. The houses of the Roman aristocracy were monuments of art; the ceilings were ebony and incrustated with ivory; the pavements were inlaid with the most precious marble; the walls were covered with

the most priceless paintings; the rooms were adorned with splendid statues, either original or copied from the great works of art of the Greeks; the furniture was sumptuous; the vessels of gold and silver, even the kitchen utensils such as pots and pans in the great houses were often artistic objects finely chased by skillful hands. Yet these houses that harbored such splendors were ill-lighted, because in the Roman halls there was lacking that clever organization of windows and skylights to which we owe the ample illumination of our abodes. Still more primitive were their means of defence against the cold. The richest Roman could eat on a silver table from gold plates, but he could have nothing which even distantly resembled those convenient furnaces which every modest burgher of our day can permit to himself. It is difficult to imagine the great luxury that was to be found in the houses of the rich nobles of northern Gaul, of Romanized Britain, of Treves, of Cologne; but it is doubtful whether with the climate of those countries, and our customs, a modern man could have lived in them without suffering from inflammation of the lungs.

In the same manner the development of Renaissance civilization, which had its birth in the midst of a military society, aimed at refining the æsthetics of private life rather than at producing ease and conveniences. Who has not admired in the great museums of the world, or in some old noble palaces of Italy, those monumental marble chimney pieces, often more than two metres high and three metres wide, which became fashionable in the sixteenth century in the houses of great lords? Many of these chimney pieces are exquisite works of art, whose marble friezes have been ornamented with the most delicate bas-reliefs by artists of the rarest ability. But these chimney-pieces, so splendid to behold, were of the very smallest use toward warming the houses. The heat they could throw out never exceeded ten per cent. of that produced, and in order to obtain a degree of warmth which to-day would not satisfy the simplest demands of a sturdy laborer it was necessary to burn half a forest. All the intellectual strength of the day was directed toward embellishing the external appearances of mantels rather than toward rendering them more capable of accom-

plishing their useful function. The same was the case with many other branches of luxury and departments of artistic adornment. Thus carvers and inlayers thought far more of embellishing chairs and beds with beautiful ornamentation than of rendering them comfortable to those who should sleep or sit therein. The chairs, arm-chairs and beds used by rich families in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are often, according to modern ideas of comfort, perhaps even less adapted to produce ease than the heating appliances. Although they are miracles of art and beauty to look upon, they are, or seem to us, for daily use only instruments of torture.

Whoever visits some great historic, princely palace of Florence, such as the Pitti for example, cannot fail to be impressed by two facts; the small amount of light that penetrates all the rooms, and the irrational disposition of the chambers, rendering them of scant convenience to those who were obliged to inhabit them. Alessandro Manzoni, speaking of Federico Borromeo, makes one of those acute observations that are often equivalent to an entire historical treatise. He notes that Borromeo while dressed quite simply took great care to be clean. "A rare thing," he says, "in that age of dirt and display." This remark concerning the Spanish-Lombard aristocracy of the seventeenth century, which reflected the customs of the Spanish aristocracy, may be applied to all civilized societies of the past as compared with those of the present. Display was there united, even in the richest classes, with great dirtiness,—personal dirtiness and dirt in the houses, the streets, and the cities. To wash seems to us a most simple habit, yet it required time before men were brought to regard it in this light. In the society of the past there was little love between men and water, even in the highest and most refined classes. It may be objected that in the days of the Roman Empire baths were of general use, but they served rather to gratify a sensuous pleasure than for the purpose of personal cleanliness. The baths were constructed for diversion; it gave a delightful physical sensation to be immersed in tepid or cold water, and to vary by subtle artifices the temperature of the body. So true is it that the need for personal cleanliness had little to do with the pas-

sion for baths, that in the Thermæ many people bathed together in receptacles that were by no means large and in which the water necessarily quickly became dirty. Baths were simply a sensuous diversion, like the dance, like wine. In that epoch when all sensuous pleasures easily became morbid passions, there was also a Sybaritism of the bath which had its votaries who abused its use and would take as many as five, six and seven immersions a day. This is also confirmed by the modest Cinderella-like place that was assigned in the world of the toilette, even in the most civilized societies of the day, to an object which is now regarded as of supreme importance, namely soap. In all the ancient world the place now occupied by soap, was held by perfumes and substances destined to procure a sensual pleasure, and while the commerce in perfumes led to an enormous traffic, hardly a trace is found of any commerce in soaps. It seems that the Romans did not know of it until the days of Pliny, deriving it, it would seem, from the barbarian peoples of the North. Even the Arabs, who quickly formed a rich aristocracy after they had become dominant in Europe, men fond of all luxuries and display, to whom merchants bore all the refinement and conveniences of the toilette from all the world, from India as well as from distant Scandanavia, were unaware of the product called soap, until some two or more centuries after the foundation of their empire, an evident sign that less need was felt for it than for perfumes.

It is therefore beyond question that if we confront the luxury of past times with that of our own days, ours presents a much more common and material aspect. By a curious contradiction luxury follows an evolution exactly contrary to that of other great social movements, such as religion, morality, art. While these become spiritualized as they progress, and seek to satisfy more and more the nobler sides of man, his thoughts and his conscience rather than his senses, endeavoring to procure for him spiritual ecstasy rather than voluptuous sensations; luxury, on the other hand, becomes materialized, and grows more and more the humble servant of the body, bending itself to pandering to man's lowest needs and almost relinquishing any idea of satisfying the pleasures of his soul. To shelter the body



from cold or heat, to save it as far as may be from muscular fatigue, to eliminate all sensations disagreeable to our refined senses, to produce comfort when we walk, sit, read, eat or sleep, such is the supreme ideal of modern luxury. Only an eccentric person would choose nowadays to sleep in an old comfortable bed because it had been inlaid by a great artist.

This increasing materialization of modern luxury is one of the favorite arguments by which the too ardent adherents of art maintain that our age is the most prosaic and commonplace that can be found in history, and that if the world has made material progress as a counterpoise, a great vulgarity of tastes, of habits, of sentiments has become universal, rendering private life almost devoid of any æsthetic character. Such an interpretation is however too unilateral and takes a too limited conception of life; for this transformation of luxury, even if it may be considered artistically as a retrogression, socially it is one of the many forms which illustrate the great moral progress of our age. Indeed this transformation of luxury does not merely indicate a change of tastes, it indicates even more forcibly, a moral evolution, a great augmentation in social solidarity. In fact bodily comforts and health, even if in themselves they seem entirely selfish, comprise instead a rudiment of social solidarity, because health and strength are essential conditions requisite in order that a man may contribute his quota of work toward society. Whoever fritters away his own health not only wastes himself but robs society, inasmuch as he diminishes his own capacity to fulfill his duties toward his fellow-men. An aristocracy, like nearly all those which dominated in the past, which in the manners and actions of private life only considered display, pomp, artistic beauty, without giving thought to the right of the human organism to be protected against the numerous exterior causes of pain, shows the fundamental principles of its ethics to be very egotistical and its search after pleasure to be stronger than every other consideration.

In the same manner the evolution of luxury, whereby cleanliness and decency have largely usurped the place of importance that was formerly given to display, is only one of the

many aspects in which the great moral evolution is made manifest, and an infinitely larger sense of human solidarity has developed. Cleanliness is for the body what dignity is for the soul, and display is for the body what vanity is for the mind. Display is an egotistical waste of an enormous quantity of labor directed to satisfy the vanity of a few; cleanliness, on the other hand, is a social duty. The man who merely endeavors to be dressed sumptuously is an egotist whose only aim is to make an impression; the man who attends to his own cleanliness is a man who has attained to a finer sense of his physical dignity, and who begins to carry into effect the principle of solidarity, the principle that a man must contribute by the care of his own body to the decency and hygiene of all society.

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## DISCUSSIONS.

### MR. HAYWARD'S EVALUATION OF PROFESSOR SIDGWICK'S ETHICS.

In the January number of the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS*, Mr. F. H. Hayward devotes an article to setting forth the "true significance" of Professor Sidgwick's "Methods of Ethics," and I should like to be allowed to make a few observations on his view.

Mr. Hayward begins by describing Professor Sidgwick as in aim and sympathies an empiricist, "unconscious perhaps that the irruptive forces [of Idealism] had broken into the citadel of his own thought"; "unconsciously influenced" [by Kant, and his school.]

But it is I think undoubted that there has never been a teacher who has exhibited more clearly, thoroughly, and unsparingly the utter incoherence of empiricism. It would be a sheer impossibility, one would imagine, for any intelligent pupil of Professor Sidgwick's, or student of his writings, to be an empiricist in ethics. Again, substantial acceptance of Kant's Categorical Imperative as far as it goes, is explicitly set forth, in the "Methods of Ethics" (*cf.* p. 386, etc., 5th Ed.), and "the leading *motif* of